

## **Personal Statement, Relevant Background, & Future Goals**

In 1987, the longest-running marriage study vanished from psychology. Its original investigator, Dr. E. Lowell Kelly died, bequeathing the Kelly/Connolly Longitudinal Study on Personality and Aging (KCLS) to his appointed heir, Dr. James Conley. However, after a lost tenure bid, Conley disappeared, leaving the data strewn across three universities and one private archive. With only two noteworthy publications<sup>1,2</sup> over 25 years, the study seemed lost forever. Nevertheless, my cross-country pursuit of and work with the KCLS taught me the tenacity and passion needed to explore how our identities influence our futures.

### **Home Making or Bread Making?**

Growing up, marriage was *the* topic around my family's dinner table. My grandmother took it upon herself to advise me on the ideal husband. "Marry a doctor," she said. "He'll be respected and wealthy." Money was the key selling point in these conversations; a wealthy husband meant I could stay home. And stay home I did - I spent my time delving into stories surrounding the Cold War. However, during my casual exploration of the Cold War, I became fascinated by the irreconcilable domestic images of the 1950s. On one hand, housework fulfilled the Betty Crocker wife, who managed to clean, cook, and care for her children and husband all while bedecked with pearls. On the other hand, the Betty Friedan wife, found herself bound to her kitchen and destined to serve her family without a purpose of her own. I felt that these images simply could not portray the same reality. That said, although my mother did not vacuum in pearls, those idealized gender roles colored every moment of my childhood. So, when I was filling out my college applications, I felt that I barely had a choice. The women in my family majored in psychology to hunt for husbands, and the men majored in economics to hunt for jobs in finance. Suffice it to say, while commerce never excited me, it was better than the alternative. That alternative might thrill some, but I simply could not be a housewife.

While finishing my economics degree at Washington University, I enrolled in a course that addressed the irreconcilable images of the American housewife. Our readings presented evidence for both sides. One of the readings, May's *Homeward Bound*<sup>2</sup> approached the debate with a psychology study. May used the KCLS to explore the early Cold War domestic experience. She theorized that home life was dominated by a culture of "domestic containment," where Cold War anxiety drove individuals to endorse traditional gender roles and to ostracize anyone that didn't conform.

May's domestic containment theory resembles terror management theory.<sup>3</sup> Faced with constant threat of death (*e.g.*, nuclear annihilation), individuals relieve this death-induced anxiety by shifting their focus away from their lives and onto their cultural legacy (*e.g.*, capitalist America). Although the theory seemed reasonable, I immediately found May's interpretation of KCLS problematic. By page 15, May had made the following strong claim that I could not reconcile: She argued that the KCLS participants embodied the American cultural standard. "These norms represent[ed] the ideal toward which [all] Americans strove. During the postwar years, there were no groups in the [US] for whom these norms were irrelevant."<sup>2</sup> The KCLS may have been representative of the heterosexual middle class, but the KCLS participants were not the norms towards which everyone strove. Immigrants, racial minorities, and homosexuals did not strive to fit themselves into that box.

I was frustrated. Such a strong claim of external validity made me question the conclusions May drew, particularly about KCLS gender differences in marital satisfaction. After numerous

passionate disagreements with my history professor, I decided that my best strategy was to test whether May's claims held under the scrutiny of the t-test.

### **Early Research**

**Econometrics:** Due to fortuitous scheduling, I had also enrolled in an econometrics course in applied regression, where I could replicate any scientific paper for the final project. I chose to replicate Kelly and Conley's regression<sup>1</sup> of personality and family background variables predicting marital satisfaction. Such a choice allowed me to test May's claims of KCLS gender differences. Using her book as a guide, I located the first two waves (1935-1955) at Harvard University. However, when I dove into the data, I discovered that the personality items were missing!

I substituted the peer rated personality variables with behavioral proxies from the 1950s. Although I almost matched the paper's final  $R^2=.49$ , with my own  $R^2=.46$ , using variables from the 1950s inflated my estimate. While the missing personality variables hindered my replication, they did not hinder my gender differences tests. There were no significant gender differences.

I realized I could use my economic toolbox for interesting questions. Inspired, I switched my second major from history to psychology and scoured the psychology department for any faculty member, who could help me use these new tools. I found two: Dr. Michael Strube and Dr. Joshua Jackson. My work with them has changed my life.

**Social Behavior Lab:** In the spring of my junior year, I joined Strube's lab as a research assistant. I assisted in numerous studies, including his self-esteem dynamics longitudinal study. Assisting in this study fostered my respect for the tenacity required for longitudinal research.

That summer, I designed a validity study within the context of my experimental psychology class (Garrison, in press).<sup>4</sup> I examined the validity and reliability of two extraversion scales from popular press personality tests. After demonstrating that each was unreliable - and therefore invalid - I resolved the tests' poor reliability. This project expanded my interests beyond the institution of marriage. I learned that there were systematic approaches for assessing the merits of a test. This paper has been accepted, pending revision, by the *Journal of Young Investigators*.

Under Strube's guidance, my honors thesis addressed predictors of marital satisfaction from the KCLS (Garrison, 2013).<sup>5</sup> Expanding upon my econometrics project, I predicted marital satisfaction from prenuptial marital expectations in a two-level model. Using principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation, I found 5 factors. Two, respect and fidelity, predicted marital satisfaction after 20 years. I found no gender differences, again. By using a multilevel model, I directly assessed gender differences within the predictive model. This research taught me the value of advanced methodology and that my interest lay in gender and individual differences. I had grown intrigued by how these differences predict multiple long-term outcomes.

### **KCLS Revival**

While pursuing my thesis, I contacted the other quantitatively inclined faculty member I had identified - Dr. Jackson. I felt compelled to find the missing personality variables and explore potential avenues of research. Intrigued by the abandoned study, Jackson and I requested full access to the KCLS. However, Harvard required the original investigator's approval. Although I demonstrated that Kelly had died 25 years ago, I was unable to find Conley. Jackson and I contacted everyone, who might know his whereabouts. Many assumed him dead. By mid-September, we had exhausted our leads.

I poured every spare moment into finding Conley. I started reading his other research, hoping for a lead. A hundred articles later, I found a book about the KCLS by Gilbert and Connolly.<sup>6</sup> With nothing to lose, I opened it. Connolly was Conley!

He had legally changed his name and set up practice in Connecticut. A few internet searches later revealed a LinkedIn account and a law degree. Jackson and I wrote and rewrote our first email. A few phone calls later we had full access. Even better, we had convinced Connolly that the KCLS needed to be revived.

**Validity Study:** We immediately inventoried the KCLS personality variables. We combined the individual items across multiple personality tests and – at my insistence – the Strong Vocational Inventory. With the inclusion of the Strong, it appeared that we could create sound measures of the Big Five. Drawing upon my experience with my extraversion validity study,<sup>4</sup> I collected over 1,000 participants on Amazon’s mechanical Turk. I then created five reliable factors that correlated strongly with the Big Five, which had never been done on data so old. We are using these factors for the self ratings and peer ratings of personality from 1935.

**Personality & Longevity:** We are using these factors to predict longevity of the KCLS participants (Jackson, Garrison, *et al.*, 2014).<sup>7</sup> After learning Cox regression and other survival analytic techniques, I conducted the preliminary analysis, which has found that conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism predict longevity after 70 years. Furthermore, we have found that peer ratings predict significantly better than self or spouse ratings.

**Marital Duration:** Extending my thesis, I have found that conscientiousness and neuroticism predict the length of marriage (Garrison, *et al.*, 2014).<sup>8</sup> Preliminary results suggest that neuroticism was more influential early in the marriage, while conscientiousness was influential throughout. I am presenting these findings at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, this February. Hogan Assessments has awarded me a travel grant to ensure that these findings are disseminated. I will be first author on the paper that expands upon these findings.

### **Vanderbilt University**

While conducting the personality-longevity analysis, I tested how intelligence predicted longevity. It was the strongest predictor of longevity, with effect sizes greater than all the personality variables. Jackson and I are pursuing this project with Dr. Savelyev, a Vanderbilt economist. In addition to my work with the KCLS, my advisor Dr. Rodgers and I are exploring individual differences in achievement among the most intelligent in the NLSY.

Because of my commitment to diversity, I have become an active member in Peabody Queeries - a graduate student LGBT organization. Recently, I have applied to join the APA Graduate Student Committee on LGBT Concerns. I hope to share my own perspective and encourage individuals of diversity to contribute to the field. I am also involved in encouraging women to enter the sciences.

### **Future Ambitions**

I want to become a professor of psychology. I am interested in the relationship between personality and intelligence within a longitudinal framework. In order to best address these questions, I sought a Ph.D in Quantitative Methods. At Vanderbilt, I am developing methodological and intelligence expertise that I cannot receive anywhere else. Afterwards, I will seek a post-doctoral position in a personality lab. This additional step was necessary because no university provided training in all three elements. After this post-doc, I hope to become a faculty member in a psychology department, where I can mentor students, teach advanced statistical methods, pursue my individual differences research, and continue co-directing the Kelly/Connolly Longitudinal Study.

**Refs:** (1) Kelly & Conley (1987) *JPSP*, 52(1). (2) May (1988) Basic. (3) Rosenblatt, *et al.* (1989) *JPSP*, 57(4). (4) Garrison (in press). *J. Young Investigators*. (5) Garrison (2013) [Abstract] *Wash. U. Senior Hons. Thesis Abstracts*. (6) Gilbert & Connolly (1991) Springer. (7) Jackson, Garrison, *et al.* (2014 Feb). Symposium to be presented at SPSP. (8) Garrison, *et al.* (2014 Feb). Poster to be presented at SPSP.